

Additionally, this provision will have untold effects on many small rural communities. It is unacceptable to force communities to pay up to \$100,000 in a local cost share, in addition to the many costs they currently incur in running a small local airport.

We respectfully request the removal of Section 408 from the Vision 100—Century of Aviation reauthorization Act Conference Report before it is brought to the House and Senate floors for consideration and we look forward to working with you in the future to ensure rural communities continue to receive essential air service.

Sincerely,

John E. Peterson, Allen Boyd, John McHugh, Jerry Moran, Bill Shuster, Chris Cannon, John Shimkus, Marion Berry, Barbara Cubin, Charles F. Bass, Ron Paul, John Tanner, Frank D. Lucas, Scott McInnis, Kenny C. Hulshof, Rick Renzi, Rob Bishop, Dennis A. Cardoza, Jim Gibbons, Jim Matheson, Ed Case, Anibal Acevedo-Vila, Mike Ross, Tom Udall, Lane Evans, Timothy Johnson, Bernie Sanders, John Boozman, Tom Latham, Heather Wilson, Ron Lewis, Jo Ann Emerson, Doug Bereuter, Bart Stupak, Collin C. Peterson.

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge our Nation's independent community pharmacists for their diligent work, expansion of services, and consistent high quality service.

Independent community pharmacies are a strong part of our health care delivery system and a significant part of local economies. In fact, independent pharmacies, independent pharmacy franchises, and independent chains represent a \$67 billion marketplace. Clearly, independent pharmacies create jobs while providing high quality services to consumers.

Independent community pharmacies play a critical role in local communities, a role which has enhanced the level and quality of pharmacist-patient personal interactions and has led to high satisfaction rates from consumers. Independent pharmacies should be commended for their accessibility, immense knowledge about medications, and broad inventories of medications. These observations were validated by more than 32,000 readers surveyed by Consumer Reports, which found that "more than 85 percent of customers at independent drugstores were very satisfied or completely satisfied with their experience."

Pharmacists are health care professionals who consistently strive to improve care and promote the safe use of drugs. In addition to dispensing medications, many independent pharmacies offer other services to meet the needs of their customers. This includes providing health screenings, disease management information, and even home delivery.

I am honored today to recognize the achievements of independent pharmacies for their excellent job in serv-

ing the pharmaceutical and other health care needs of consumers in their communities. As Congress moves forward with enacting a Medicare prescription drug benefit, it is essential that we preserve the quality care being provided by community pharmacies.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to print in the RECORD an article from the October 2003 issue of Consumer Reports.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

TIME TO SWITCH DRUGSTORES?

If you're among the 47 percent of Americans who get medicine from drugstore giants such as CVS, Eckerd, and Rite Aid, here's a prescription: Try shopping somewhere else. The best place to start looking is one of the 25,000 independent pharmacies that are making a comeback throughout the U.S.

Independent stores, which were edging toward extinction a few years ago, won top honors from Consumer Reports readers, besting the big chains by an eye-popping margin. More than 85 percent of customers at independent drugstores were very satisfied or completely satisfied with their experience, compared with 58 percent of chain-drugstore customers.

Many supermarket and mass-merchant pharmacies also did a better job than the best-known conventional chains at providing caring, courteous, knowledgeable, and timely service. And in a nationwide price study we conducted, the chains we evaluated charged the highest prices—even slightly more than the independents.

Those findings come from our latest investigation into the best places to shop for prescription medications. More than 32,000 readers told us about more than 40,000 experiences at 31 national and regional drugstore chains (like CVS, Genovese, Osco, Rite Aid, and Walgreens); supermarket-pharmacy combos (such as Kroger, Publix, and Safeway); mass-merchant pharmacies (like Costco, Target, and Wal-Mart); and independent pharmacies across the nation.

For most consumers, insurance covers at least some of the cost of prescription drugs, so our Ratings emphasize service factors that affect everyone. For consumers who have to pay more than a small percentage of their prescription-drug costs, including more than a third of our readers, our price study indicated where to save money. (See Where to shop, how to save.)

Among the other highlights of our research:

Some of the drugstore chains and supermarkets that readers favored are family owned or businesses in which workers have a stake. Medicine Shoppe, the top "chain," is actually a collection of about 1,000 individually owned and operated stores with a common parent company. Among supermarkets, high-rated Wegmans (in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) is family owned; and at high-rated Publix (in the South), most workers are stockholders.

Forty percent of readers said that at least once during the past year, their drugstore was out of the medicine they needed.

Our market basket of a month's worth of five widely prescribed medications cost \$377 to \$555, depending on where we shopped. For a family needing all five drugs, that difference would exceed \$2,000 a year.

SORTING OUT THE STORES

Most people start by searching for a store that accepts their insurance plan. Fortunately, that isn't the hassle it used to be, especially since independents are accepting

more plans these days. Insurers once considered the disparate stores too much trouble to work with, but they realized that keeping independents out of their networks alienated customers and didn't cut costs as much as they'd hoped. Also, 33 states have adopted "any willing provider" laws, which require insurance companies to take into their networks any pharmacy that's willing to accept the insurer's reimbursement rate. As a result, you have a greater choice of where and how to shop.

The basic choices:

Independents: Service is all. Prescription drugs are the independents' lifeblood, accounting for 88 percent of sales. That means independents can be a good source of hard-to-find medications. (The chains, where drugs account for 64 percent of sales, tend to focus on the 200 most-prescribed drugs.)

That focus on prescriptions can mean more personal attention. Readers said that pharmacists at independent stores were accessible, approachable, and easy to talk to, and that they were especially knowledgeable about medications, both prescription and nonprescription.

The independents (and some chains) offer extras such as disease-management education, in-store health screenings for cholesterol, services such as compounding (customizing medications for patients with special needs), and home delivery.

Many independents are affiliated with programs such as Good Neighbor or Value-Rite, whose names you'll see in the stores. These "banner" programs, offered by wholesale product suppliers, help independents with marketing and with the sale of private-label products, improving purchasing power and name recognition much the way ServiStar and True Value help small hardware stores compete with Home Depot and Lowe's.

About half of the nation's independents have Web sites, where you can generally order medicine and find some health information but not much more.

Chains: Convenient but crowded. With about 20,000 stores nationwide, mega-drugstores are in nearly everyone's backyard. Many are open around the clock, have a drive-through pharmacy for faster pickup, and let you order online or by punching a few numbers on a telephone. You can even set up your Web account to have renewals automatically processed and readied for pickup or mailing. The biggest chains let you check prices online. Another advantage: The chains accept payment from lots of health plans (managed care pays for 80 percent of all conventional-chain prescriptions).

Now for the drawbacks. The chains' locations in populous areas and their acceptance of a plethora of plans has made them, in effect, too popular, and service is suffering. Except for Medicine Shoppe, chains typically made readers wait longer, were slower to fill orders, and provided less personal attention than other types of drugstores.

Like other drugstores, the chains have experienced shrinking reimbursement from insurers. They've helped maintain profits by selling everything from milk to Halloween costumes. That makes one-stop shopping possible (if your list isn't too specific), but it also can create bottlenecks at the checkout.

Supermarkets: One stop does it. There are fewer than 9,000 supermarkets that include a pharmacy, but the number is rising. One-stop shopping is the attraction. Many supermarkets put the pharmacy near the entrance for easy access and to attract store traffic. For those very reasons, however, you may not have as much privacy to consult with the druggist as you would elsewhere.

Supermarkets have online pharmacy sites, usually as a link from the home page, but they're often less comprehensive than those of big drugstore chains.